

Is there a vaccine?

There is now a vaccine which protects against the main types of HPV (types 6 and 11 which cause genital warts, and types 16 and 18 which cause the majority of HPV related cancers).

The HPV vaccine is offered to all girls in 1st year through the schools immunisation programme to prevent cervical cancer.

This HPV vaccine is currently available to men who have sex with men under the age of 26 through public STI clinics, and to HIV positive men and women under the age of 26 attending public HIV clinics. Ask a nurse or doctor at your sexual health clinic for more information.

Genital warts in pregnancy

Because of changes in the body's immune system during pregnancy, warts may appear for the first time during pregnancy.

During pregnancy, genital warts can be treated with cryotherapy (freezing). Having genital warts very rarely affects the baby. Pregnant women with warts should be reassured that there is very little risk to their baby. If you have warts and you are pregnant you should tell your doctor or nurse.

You can order more copies of this leaflet free of charge from www.healthpromotion.ie

**Sexual Health &
Crisis Pregnancy Programme**



A guide to Genital Warts (HPV)

October 2017

sexualwellbeing.ie



What are genital warts?

Genital warts are 'warts' in the genital area caused by a virus called the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). There are many different types of HPV. Types 6 and 11 are the types that commonly cause genital warts.

Genital warts are similar to the warts you can get on other parts of the body. They are usually painless and harmless.

Warts may sometimes go away on their own without treatment but can stay for months or even years.

There are some types of HPV that may lead to cancer, notably anal, throat and penile cancer in men and cervical cancer in women.

The types of HPV that cause genital warts **do not** cause cancer.

If you have genital warts, we recommend that you have routine tests for all sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis and HIV.

How common is genital HPV?

Genital HPV is the most common sexually transmitted disease worldwide. The highest rates of HPV infection occur in the 18 to 28 year age group.

The majority of HPV infections do not cause any symptoms and infections usually clear up on their own.

How do I get HPV?

HPV is passed by skin to skin contact, usually genital skin to skin contact. This doesn't need to be penetrative sex (vaginal, anal or oral sex), but could be close genital contact.

It is common for sexually active people to come in contact with HPV.

Lots of people who come into contact with HPV don't develop warts.

You cannot catch HPV by:

- hugging
- kissing
- sharing towels
- toilets
- swimming pools
- sharing cutlery, cups, etc.

What symptoms would I have?

Most people with HPV do not have any symptoms and they don't know that they have the infection.

If you do get genital warts, they are often flesh-coloured lumps or bumps on the skin, anywhere in the genital or anal area.

They may appear weeks to months after you come into contact with the virus.

Can I be tested for genital warts?

Genital warts are diagnosed by the doctor or nurse examining the affected area.

How are genital warts treated?

Sometimes genital warts go away on their own without treatment, but most people prefer to get them treated.

Treatments may take a few weeks or months to work.

Sometimes the warts come back after treatment.

Treatments include:

- creams or lotions which can be used at home
- cryotherapy (freezing)
- surgery – if the warts are severe and do not respond to other treatments.

What about my partner?

Your partner only needs to attend for examination if they develop any symptoms of warts.

Is it ok to have sex again?

Yes. Most sexually active people have been exposed to HPV at some time but have not had any symptoms, so they may be immune.

You can talk with your doctor or nurse about this.